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CIA hops to probe of plot to kill the Pope

THE CIA, hit by a storm of criticism, has agreed to put a high priority on the investigation of Soviet and Bulgarian links to the plot to kill Pope John Paul II.

CIA Director William Casey, who was called on the carpet by President Reagan for his agency's foot-dragging — and later accused by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato of covering up the investigation — has reportedly assigned seven agents to help Italian authorities.

Casey relayed the new initiative to D'Amato at a top-secret meeting last week in his Langley, Va., office.

The two feisty Long Islanders had a series of acrimonious exchanges but D'Amato emerged from the meeting saying he was "satisfied" the CIA was getting into the act.

But the CIA — which once stated privately it believed Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca

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 By NILES LATHEM

acted alone — has a long way to go to catch up with the Italians.